

inside d p s

Wearing festive Mardi Gras beads, dozens of Denver School of the Arts students brought the artistic spirit of New Orleans to downtown Denver. Pictured here is a New Orleans evacuee who happened upon the noontime performances.



schools open doors, hearts to hurricane katrina evacuees

Schools in Denver opened their doors to Hurricane Katrina's evacuees, raising tens of thousands in cash and making sure that affected children in Denver were in school as soon as families were ready.

Within days of the late-August disaster on the Gulf Coast, Denver had enrolled about four dozen students whose families had arrived either by their own means or with the federal government's assistance.

Raising money for basics from backpacks to clothing, meals and bus passes, thousands of Denver students and staff opened their hearts to evacuees.

Denver School of the Arts students collected more than \$2,400 in cash donations by recreating in downtown Denver the artistic spirit of New Orleans. Student artists spent four lunch hours on the 16th Street Mall presenting jazzy, carnivale-themed performances.

"Their ideas and passion for making a difference are so moving and inspiring," said Robert Styron, director of vocal music at Denver School of the Arts and also a New Orleans native.

"They are so eager to help and feel empowered

that they can actually impact recovery."

Whether having the personal means to give a little or a lot, Denver students pitched in to help evacuees begin rebuilding their lives. The list of charitable gifts could fill pages – here are just a few examples:

- Carson Elementary School hosted a blood drive to benefit those hurt in the disaster
- Cory Elementary School collected \$1,486 that was doubled by an individual parent
- Denver Public Schools Foundation and other local foundations collected 160 boxes of supplies for evacuees pouring into Houston schools
- East High School raised \$2,139 in a coin drive and also hosted a benefit dinner and concert
- Fairmont Dual Language Immersion Academy students sold "Katrina Relief" bracelets
- Hill Campus of Arts & Sciences students donated \$749 out of their pockets to the American Red Cross
- Horace Mann Middle School students baked and sold homemade cinnamon rolls
- Middle school principals gave \$1,000 to the American Red Cross ■

denver chooses new chief academic officer



Jaime Aquino of the New York City Department of Education joins Denver Public Schools this month as the new Chief Academic Officer.

"In Jaime Aquino, we have found a person with an outstanding pattern of success and a genuine passion for improving student achievement," said Superintendent Michael Bennet during the announcement last month. "He is knowledgeable about the learning needs of English language learners and is a proven educational leader in mathematics, science and the practice of teaching and learning. In addition, his leadership style is defined by teamwork and collaboration – one that reminds us that this is a community-wide challenge and that we all play a role.

"He was New York State's bilingual teacher of the year in 1990 and is somebody who comes to this district as a reluctant administrator. His passion is teaching students in the classroom ... and I think that that passion is going to be infectious."

Aquino left his position as Local Instructional Superintendent for the New York City Department of Education to come to Denver.

"I've done a lot of things in my career, but I like to define myself as a teacher," Aquino said at the September news conference announcing his appointment. "I prefer that title to that of Chief Academic Officer. I never wanted to be anything else but a teacher. Teaching, as you all know, is a noble profession and the most important one. Teachers truly touch tomorrow, and by doing so, they affect eternity. I have an incredible respect for teachers and though, for the last several years, many might consider my career position far removed from the classroom, I am still and will always be a teacher at heart."

"As we learn this month about the Jewish holiday Rosh Hashanah, I find these words from the Talmud inspiring, 'Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers grow, grow.' I plan to give my heart and soul to make sure that every student in Denver has his or her own angel – a teacher or mentor – who constantly reminds him or her to continue growing."

During his recent visits to Denver, Aquino said he saw a city, including the Mayor, community, parents and businesses, that is rallying around Denver Public Schools.

"Denver Public Schools cannot raise Denver's children alone," he said. "It has to be a community effort. So, I'm here to support and embrace the three goals the Superintendent has outlined for the school

system – making sure that we have a safe and orderly environment in all of our buildings, making sure that we have a highly-skilled faculty that has access to robust professional development as well as timely data so that they can adjust their instructional practices, and finally, making sure that every single principal who is leading our buildings is truly an instructional leader and not only a manager."

Aquino echoed Board of Education President Les Woodward in saying that Denver is a city moving forward, not backward.

"That is going to be our motto for our school system – a system that is moving forward and not backward," said Aquino. "I am honored to be part of the team the Superintendent has assembled with the mission of making sure that every school in our city is a place of academic excellence ... I think the infrastructure is in place, both in terms of facilities and also in terms of teaching and learning, and now it's time to take it to the next level." ■

Analysis of Reforms Starts This Month

An independent assessment of the district's reform efforts by the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) begins on Monday, October 3 with a team from the council beginning interviews in schools and offices across Denver.

The team will assess fiscal alignment, take inventory of academic programs and services, and check faculty and community perceptions about the alignment and quality of those programs.

Superintendent Michael Bennet stressed that the work will be one input to the collective evaluation the district's reform efforts.

The members of the CGCS team have strong curriculum backgrounds and credentials in mathematics, literacy, professional development, accountability, low-performing schools and organization/management. All have experience in large urban districts.

The scope of work will be extensive – looking at most of Denver's instructional programs and services. The work will lead to reviews of area offices, central and site-based academic committees, and such departments as Curriculum and Instruction, Early Education, English Language Acquisition, Extended Learning, Federal Programs, School of Choice, Gifted and Talented, and Planning, Assessment and Research. Team members also will study the professional development for principals and teachers.

The assessment is being paid completely with private sources and not by Denver Public Schools.

The Council of Great City Schools is a coalition of 65 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. It works to promote urban education through legislation, research, media relations, instruction, management, technology and other special projects designed to improve the quality of urban education. ■

Office of Volunteer Services Helps Manage Volunteers, Donations

The Office of Volunteer Services has reorganized to focus on volunteer processing and donations. Brenda Vasquez is the new coordinator of volunteer services. Formerly the director of volunteer services for Denver Health, Vasquez brings 15 years of volunteer management experience.

The office assists schools with criminal background checks since volunteers may not begin their work until they have been cleared by the Human Resources department's Colorado Bureau of

Investigation background check.

To initiate a background check, complete the form available online at <http://cpc.dpsk12.org> and fax it to 720-424-8266 (two-week processing timeline).

The office also coordinates in-kind donations. Stay tuned for information about an upcoming website to match donors with schools in need of donated items.

The Office of Volunteer Services will host trainings for school secretaries on Friday, October 7 and Wednesday, October 19. Please contact Brenda Vasquez at 720-424-8245 for more information.

inside ProComp

ProComp milestones reached



ProComp staff and volunteers are hard at work this fall ensuring that “everyone who participates in a ProComp activity or seeks information will have a high quality experience,” said Connie White, co-chair of the ProComp Transition Team. Development of ProComp continued over the summer, and White noted that several critical milestones were achieved.

- Student growth objectives: Because objective setting is linked to improved student achievement, the district is expanding resources for teachers and principals. Special teams in each quadrant will be trained to assist others in writing strong objectives, determining the appropriate assessment tools and incorporating effective instructional strategies. A new online tool will be launched later this fall, and an instructional video will be available in October, to assist with the objective writing process.
- Professional development unit (PDU): The Professional Development Unit is being field tested this year by 150 teachers and specialists. A PDU handbook with guidelines has been developed and many sample PDUs are available. Educators can earn graduate credit this year for participating in the field test.
- Tuition reimbursement: This element has been approved for early implementation in the 2005-2006 school year.
- Market incentives: Teachers and student services professionals working in designated hard-to-serve schools and filling hard-to-staff positions can earn these incentives in 2005-2006 if they meet the requirements for the No Child Left Behind Act and Colorado Department of Education.
- Professional evaluation: This element is undergoing an expanded pilot this year using improved evaluation forms and

PDU Field Test Begins: Teachers and student services professionals will be field testing the ProComp Professional Development Unit this year, which will reward teachers for learning a new skill, demonstrating it with students and reflecting on its effectiveness. The PDU plans will be reviewed by five teams comprised of teachers, curriculum specialists and educators from higher education. Teams will review and approve PDU plans and suggest modifications when needed. Reviewers will contact field testers at least twice during the year to respond to questions and discuss the PDU process.

requiring three (not five) records of teaching or service.

- Streamlining work load: A special Integration Work Group is meeting this fall to recommend ways that teacher and principal work loads can be streamlined by combining tasks and automating paperwork.
- Opt-in salary calculator: By November the new calculator will be ready to help teachers and student services professionals (SSPs) make an informed decision about whether to join ProComp. The new calculator draws on each employee’s individual information as well as specific business rules governing each element in order to project a ProComp salary.
- Evaluating ProComp: The Program Evaluation Work Group has begun meeting with all other work groups to assess ProComp’s development. The first report should be available in November.
- Trust Fund: All but two members of the Trust Fund Board have been selected, and the full group will be ready to work after the mill levy election.

For the latest updates, access www.denverprocomp.org. ■

Detailed Training Sessions Underway for ProComp

This fall, the ProComp staff and others are conducting a variety of training and information sessions around the district to help teachers, student services professionals and various administrators understand the intricacies of ProComp.

"We know that the first opt-in window will trigger hundreds of questions and a need for greater understanding, so we are reaching out to teachers and student service providers and preparing administrators to be able to answer questions accurately," said Shirley Scott, field support team leader with ProComp.

In addition to Scott, ProComp team members Jeff Buck, Sarie Patterson, Henry Roman and Connie White are visiting schools at the invitation of principals and Association Representatives from the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. ProComp representatives are helping educators write student growth objectives, giving guidance about the new professional evaluation process and answering general questions.

An important goal this year is to ensure that principals and Association Representatives receive the same information – often at the same time.

"The principals and ARs are often on the front line of questioning, and we want them to share a common understanding and knowledge about ProComp," said Scott.

During September and October, HR staff, Welcome Center and Business Services staff, DoTS and HR call center operators are participating in eight one-hour workshops to learn the details of ProComp.

"We expect a huge surge in calls to Human Resources, Business Services Center, Payroll and the Call Center," said Lita Weinstein, acting executive director of Human Resources. "We are preparing these departments with in-depth training, resource materials and online tools to answer questions quickly and accurately."

The training sessions include an overview of ProComp, plus everything from getting tuition reimbursement to establishing an initial salary level under ProComp.

The first opt-in window takes place between November 7 and December 31, 2005, for educators who want to take advantage of ProComp's offerings in the 2005-2006 contract year.

The opt-in window for the 2006-2007 contract year will start on February 1 and run through March 31, 2006. In all, educators will have seven opt-in windows over six years if they want to join ProComp. ■

Q&A

Q. When is it appropriate to use CSAP data to measure student growth?

A. There are three ways for teachers to earn money under the Student Growth component of ProComp. The first is by setting two annual objectives, and all teachers are required to do this, regardless of whether they are in ProComp. Teachers and student services professionals who meet one or both goals will receive payments under ProComp. Teachers and student services professionals are specifically prohibited from using CSAP when setting annual objectives.

However, a specific CSAP element exists in ProComp. Teachers who are involved directly in CSAP testing are eligible for pay incentives if they exceed expectations on CSAP scores. The Distinguished Schools element also allows teachers to receive incentive pay, and CSAP growth is likely to be part of the criteria that will be assessed when determining the annual list of Distinguished Schools.

Q. Which ProComp payments will be made during the current school year?

A. The first ProComp payments for teachers who have opted into ProComp during the current school year will begin at the end of January 2006. The payments for Market Incentives and Tuition Reimbursement both will be available during the current school year if the November 1 mill levy passes. The payments will be retroactive to September 2005.

If You're Thinking About Opting Into ProComp ...

The first opt-in window for teachers and student service providers opens on Monday, November 7 and runs through Saturday, December 31. (Those who are eligible to opt into ProComp will be able to signal their decision through a web interface.) Teachers and student services professionals who are considering whether to opt in should begin preparations now for the process.

1. Review transcripts. Initial salary placement in ProComp depends upon current transcripts, so teachers should be certain that the Department of Human Resources has the latest information. Look through personal files to make certain the information is up to date, and order new transcripts if necessary.
2. Check the new salary calculator. A new online salary calculator is being developed that will provide each teacher with personal salary information and how the salary would fare under ProComp. It will be available later this fall.
3. Ask questions. HR and other administrative personnel are being trained to answer ProComp questions. ProComp specialists are visiting schools to provide information, and special information sessions are being planned. For more information, access www.denverprocomp.org. ■

ProComp

The Professional Compensation System for Teachers was designed jointly by the Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association.

For more information about ProComp, visit www.denverprocomp.org or email Brad_Jupp@dpsk12.org.



comings & goings

Appointments

Bobby Allen: Night Custodial Helper, George Washington High School
Walter L. Anderson: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Rosa Andrade: Night Custodian Helper, Rachel Noel Middle School
Faye M. Archambault: Night Custodian Helper, Thomas Jefferson High School
Santos A. Bonilla: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Renay Brown: Night Custodian Helper, George Washington High School
Marcelino Fierro III, Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Eric Froneberger: Night Custodian Helper, Montbello High School
Andre Goffney: Night Custodian Helper, George Washington High School
Amy Gustafson: Business Services Specialist, Administration
Cac N. Ho: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Leah K. Jungers: Library Tech I, Samuels Elementary School
Michael A. Leaverton: Business Services Specialist, Administration
Joel T. Licata: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Mary P. Mauer: Library Tech I, Southmoor Elementary School
Nicholas Morten: PC Applications Specialist, Operations
Dominic D. Olmos: Night Custodian Helper, Hamilton Middle School
Esther Ortega: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Chau N. Phan: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Genevieve A. Quezada-Davis: Night Custodian Helper, John F. Kennedy High School
Mark Rael: School Technology Specialist III, John F. Kennedy High School
Deon L. Smith: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Terrance W. Standlee: L2 Carpenter, Operations
Kimberly A. Stromgren: Accounting Technician II, Administration
Nicole A. Tembrock: Educational Pro-Tech, Administration
Pat Thim: Relief Bus Driver, Transportation
Stacy C. Turnbull: Area Specialist, Education

Reappointments

Lida I. Acosta: Office Support II, Education
Charles E. Adams: Facility Manager I, Knight Academy
Christopher J. Baker: Crew Chief, Operations
Ismael Deleon: Facility Manager III, Cole Middle School
Charlene M. Hastings: Secretary I, Del Pueblo Elementary School
Christopher W. Houghton: Vehicle Service Technician I, Transportation
Jolene A. Lopes: Secretary I, Smedley Elementary School
Laurie A. Lopez-Nelson: Secretary I, Bradley Elementary School
Gary Melillo: Facility Manager II, Westery Creek Elementary School
Barbara A. Raen: Secretary II, Palmer Elementary School
Timothy A. Richman: Planning/Research Analyst, Education
Judy E. Wheeler: Secretary II, Slavens Elementary School
Ann M. Williams: Office Support I, Place Middle School
Jacqueline J. Wimmer: Facility Manager II, Operations

Changes in Assignment

Deanne K. Afman: Secretary I, University Park Elementary School
Linda Albert: Educational Pro-Tech, Education
Bernard L. Allen: Custodian Assistant II, Operations
Aurelio L. Avila: Custodian Assistant II, Grant Middle School
Audrey J. Bourgeois: Area Specialist, Education
Vivian D. Chavez: Secretary I, Manual High School
Eric R. Dunlap: Custodian Assistant I, Asbury Elementary School
Elise R. Edwards: Area Specialist, Education
Mario G. Figueroa: Custodian Assistant III, Hill Middle School
Maida Finch: Area Specialist, Education
Joaquina Fuenteds: Bilingual Translator, Education
Saul Hernandez: Custodian Assistant II, Operations
Michele J. Kaspari: Secretary II, Force Elementary School
Kimberly A. Kelly: Area Specialist, Education

Selina E. Lucero: Day Custodial Helper, George Washington High School
Victor Macias: Custodian Assistant III, Cole Middle School
William L. Nobles: Interim Manager – Fleet Operations, Operations
Carol L. Nollsch: Educational Pro-Tech, Education
Devin L. Pierce: Vehicle Service Technician I, Transportation
Adrean Rivers: Area Specialist, Education
Gabriel Trujillo: Central Curriculum Coordinator, Administration
Janine M. Tucciarelli: Customer Service Representative, Administration
Kudozovic Ulfeta: Custodian Assistant I, Cowell Elementary School
Jennifer L. Woolf: Area Specialist, Education

Paul Worden: Truck Driver, Operations

Retirements

Ana S. Buckman-Hart: Social Worker, Education
Sandra P. Faingold: Speech Language Pathologist, Education
Patrick A. Garcia: Protective Coatings Supervisor, Operations
Curtis Jones: Regular Bus Driver, Transportation
Sheri B. Lucas: PC Applications Specialist III, Administration
Alice B. Morehouse: School Counselor, Henry Middle School
Steven M. Trujillo: Facility Manager II, Valdez Elementary School

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focus on

Rene Wilson

Bilingual Teacher
Harrington Elementary School

Years with Denver Public Schools: 7

Greatest or latest accomplishment:

As fourth graders, my students scored 100 proficient in math last year. I've taught them since they were in third grade. This year I'm teaching them as fifth graders.

Why you decided to become

a teacher: Working with kids has always come easily for me. I grew up in Denver's lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, and I saw the need.

Four words you think students would use to describe your teaching strategies:

Resilient, resilient, resilient, resilient – and funny. I don't allow my students to quit. Everything has to be turned in. There are no excuses.

One way you give your students recognition: I make home visits to every kid at this part of the year and also at the end of the year. It really lets the kids know that they're important.

From your experience, the most effective way to communicate with parents: Again, home visits. Once you go in to their homes, it really breaks down the barriers between teacher and parent. Another way is attending social events like barbecues where they can see you in a different light.

What you do for fun: I play basketball, I read and I'm building an addition on the house – and happy hour, of course.

Hometown: El Paso, Texas, but I've lived here most of my life.

Person who has influenced you most in life: No one more than anyone else. Different people along the way, depending on the time in my life – my high school basketball coach, teachers, mother, brother, etc. It's the negative experiences that also have shaped my life, and that's one thing I understand about my kids.

Favorite restaurant: I love number 11 N (a noodle bowl) on the menu at the New Saigon Restaurant, 630 S. Federal Blvd.

Best book you've read in the past year: Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal by Eric Schlosser.

Family: I have four brothers, five sisters and my mom.

Philosophy for life: One day at a time.



Working it. Fifth graders Graham Downing and Caitlee Mead of Steele Elementary School put the finishing touches on a classroom-sized serving of eggplant schezwan. The class spent the first part of the afternoon harvesting their own eggplant, spices and other vegetables from the school gardens.

School gardens reap bountiful lessons

Follow the smells of basil, garlic and olive oil, the soothing aromas of herbal teas and the sounds of chopping tomatoes, onions, cilantro and jalapenos, and you'll find yourself at Steele Elementary School, where it's harvest time in the school gardens.

"When you can see just a teeny weeny bit of the orange part on the top, that's when carrots are ready to pick," says Gus Williams, a fifth grader at Steele Elementary School.

On the menu today in Donna Hamilton's fifth-grade classroom is homegrown eggplant schezwan. For many students, eggplant used to be on the list of "I've-never-tried-that-before" foods.

For the fourth consecutive year, students at Steele are growing, harvesting, preparing and tasting freshly-grown vegetables, fruits and herbs with the help of parent Andrew Nowak and Slow Food USA volunteer Gigia Kolough. (Slow Food is an organization devoted to preserving traditional foodways and educating people about food as a center of community.)

"Not only do students learn about the nutritional and cultural significance of a vegetable, they also harvest, prepare, cook and taste wonderful flavors that they grew," said Nowak.

This harvest began in February with the cultivation of seeds in four classrooms using custom-designed light and heat tables. Students planted a spring garden of lettuce, radishes, onions and peas in early March. Two months later, they reaped what they sowed and held a salad festival.

Each of the school's 13 classrooms also planted a summer garden, most having a theme or a major crop. For fourth graders, it was a Native American garden featuring corn, squash and beans. The students will use their harvest as fifth graders this year when they study Native Americans and make tortillas, stews and other delicacies.

Over the summer eight families spent two weeks each helping to water and weed the gardens. Now, everyone is enjoying the fruits of this community labor. ■

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